

Muslim Mothers and French Daughters: Women Caught between Religion and Secularity in a Post-Beur Film Culture

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Recurring again and again in recent Franco-Maghrebi films, young women leave behind their minority Muslim communities for full citizenship in secular France. These films set up a false binary between “Muslim” and “French” through the trope of the traditional Muslim mother and the assimilated French daughter who embody the contemporary sociological and political debate facing France (and Europe). In these films I find an ambivalent critique of women’s roles in mitigating the effects of migration, in transmitting culture and religious values to their families, and in interpreting the alien French culture for their children and shaping responses to that culture. These films rely on narratives and images that construct women as victims of the patriarchal-Islamic family, a common stereotype about Beur culture.

I propose that these victim narratives and images mark the end of the Beur film trend. I suggest the term “post-Beur” to speak specifically about what I see as a change from the original focus in the 1980s on young male protagonists to this current mother-daughter dyad against the backdrop of the patriarchal institutions of religion and government. As discussed later, this narrative and thematic change is due in part to the global rise in anti-Muslim feeling expressed locally in the *foulard* affair. Additionally, post-Beur film makes much use of the historical drama, a genre

previously unavailable to Beur filmmakers due to budgeting and time restraints. Though the focus on female histories is a welcome development, most post-Beur films use a false binary between “modern France” and “traditional Islam” to create a series of limited choices for their own heroines.

Post-Beur Film Culture

An exploration of diverse physical and temporal settings via the historical drama epitomizes the post-Beur trend. Recent films are situated in crucial historical moments of the postcolonial immigrant experience—conscription in the colonial army (*Indigènes* or *Days of Glory*, Rachid Bouchareb, 2006), the Franco-Algerian war (*Cartouches Gauloises* or *French Bullets*, Mehdi Charef, 2007), the first influx of guest workers in France in the 1950s (*Le Gone de Chaaba* or *Shantytown Kid*, Christophe Ruggia, 1997), the Family Reunification Act of 1974 (*Inch'Allah Dimanche* or *God Willing Sunday*, Yamina Benguigui, 2001, and *17 Rue Bleue* or *17 Blue Street*, Chad Chenouga, 2001), and a Europe suffering from the vicissitudes of economic globalization (*Marie-Line*, Mehdi Charef, 2000; *La Graine et le Mulet* or *The Secret of the Grain*, Abdel Kechiche, 2007). Historical dramas are an important development of the post-Beur trend, speaking to audience interest in stories from and of the immigrant North African community. This development signals newly available funding for these projects that eclipse the Beur films' reliance on microbudget strategies. Historical films also allow for a Maghrebi re-writing of French historiographies concerning its colonial past and postcolonial present.

Post-Beur films still explore community and self in relationship to French assimilation as films in the Beur trend once did, yet these contemporary films focus on the challenges and trials of female protagonists and characters, often in relation to an Algeria-based Islam. This aspect of post-Beur film is possible for a variety of reasons. First, more women have had opportunity to make feature films, like Yamina Benguigui and Zaida Ghorba-Volta. Second, male directors like Mehdi Charef have now turned their attention to the stories of their mothers and sisters. Third, Franco-

French filmmakers like Phillipe Faucon and Coline Serreau are incorporating French-Maghrebi characters into their narratives. This narrative focus has brought about a change in thematic material, most often introducing a critique of the “Arabo-Berber-Islamic sex/gender system,” the only instance where Islam and its influence in the lives of this community are addressed (Tarr 212).

In Beur films, Islam was mostly notable because of its absence. Alec Hargreaves’ assessment about Islam’s absence in narratives from French-Maghrebian novelists applies here, because the production of novelists-turned-filmmakers buoyed Beur cinema. Second generation French-Maghrebis may not be invested in Islam for a variety of social factors. Hargreaves’ interview with Akli Tadjer, author of *Les ANI du Tassili* (*The Unidentified Arabs of Tassili*, 1986), reveals that for many Beur writers, Islam is abstract:

For our parents, Islam was very concrete. . . . Islam is easily transmissible when you are born in a Muslim cradle, when there’s a mosque, and imam, and all the religious values in a village. Here in France, there aren’t any of these things. . . . If it isn’t on TV or in the newspapers, it becomes abstract. Even the message, if it isn’t in the environment, it doesn’t become internalized (Hargreaves 19, my translation).

Tadjer attributes this loss of transmission to the first generation’s widespread illiteracy, explaining that many parents could not read the Koran themselves, so their own knowledge of Islam was reduced to a list of dos and don’ts (19).

Also, authors restrain from critiquing Islam because of their strong affective ties to the community and a wish to protect parents from offense (19). As well, authorial desire to remain unperturbed by what Hargreaves terms “ideological harassment” from the burgeoning fundamentalist groups in European city centers may lead to silence regarding a critique or engagement with religious questions (19). Lastly, many second-generation citizens in the North African immigrant community may have wanted to distance themselves from the growing civil war in Algeria between the army-backed government and the Islamic Salvation Front; laying claim to French secularism may have been one way of dismissing

an Algeria now characterized as increasingly fundamentalist in the international press.

I argue that one way to understand the increasing discussion of Islam within French films from North African filmmakers is to contextualize these filmmakers within their religious community of origin. This is not to claim that these filmmakers are or are not practicing Muslims, but instead to locate the impetus for this development in the narrative content of the films. Due to globalization, migration, and the technological ease of film production and distribution, international filmmakers affiliated with reterritorialized religious communities have also begun to produce films that discuss similar issues as those found in post-Beur films.

Religious Affiliated Film in a Global Context

Films produced by religious communities embody and negotiate the anxieties facing these communities, brought on by globalization and the changing structure of the nation-state, through representations of religious women. Yet, religious communities engage in multiple ways with forces of modernity, globalization, nationalism, and cultural change and so the cultural representations of women will vary from community to community. Immigrant and ethnic populations in the North African community in France must assimilate to French normative cultural practices for economic, social, and physical security. The French state perceives the French-Maghrebi as Muslim first, French second, if at all. For many Franco-French, who see themselves as secular in spite of their Catholic heritage, Islam typifies the alien status of the immigrant North African community. “Muslims today are seen as challenging basic tenets of French republican culture and identity [secular education being one of the most important aspects of this culture]” (Laurence and Vaisse 55) because of their demands to be recognized as a religious community in the public sphere (54). Thus, “becoming French” has been interpreted by both Franco-French and members of the North African immigrant community as leaving behind Islam and its attendant religious markers, like the foulard

(or headscarf) worn by North African women, a flashpoint in French politics and useful to our discussion here.

France has recently made efforts to accommodate Muslim populations. One of the most visible is the creation of the French Council of the Muslim Religion (FCMR), with federal hopes that the council would “encourage development of local sources of authority,” minimizing foreign manipulation and extremism of Muslim communities in France (138). The FCMR treats the presence of Islam in France similar to Judaism, Buddhism, and Christianity in order to domesticate them, to create French versions of each of these that would not disturb the state and public order. As Laurence and Vaisse report, former President Jacques Chirac argued in 2003 that state secularism was “the last protection against the encroachment of religious communities on the state in a transnational and global world” (140). At the same time, the European Union’s formation via nation-states exacerbates the citizenship issues that those nations already struggle to solve (Balibar 44). In fact, national and supranational policies and laws work to keep the migrant in a constant state of instability in relation to governmental agencies.

These instabilities manifest themselves in power relations within migrant communities. Fadela Amara’s autobiographical activist text *Breaking the Silence* documents her vision for renewing France’s high-rise suburbs as neighborhoods. Major factors in the dissolution of these neighborhoods were the recession of the 1980s that led to rampant unemployment, and the federal political upheavals that produced conservative policies regarding immigrants and citizenship. Amara points to the rise of militant Islam at a time “when a significant number of young people from the projects were completely disoriented, facing failure in school, unemployment, and discrimination” (95). Militant Islam offered a new way to envision personal identity, even if its interpretation of Muslim texts disenfranchised women within the community. Within the banlieues, women in public spaces risk policing by gangs of young men who themselves feel disenfranchised in the secular state. On one hand women’s behavior is monitored by

men in their community, on the other hand it is monitored by the state. Women have little room to create their own identities between these two powerful, often violent, forces. This challenge to female subjectivity has become the subject of post-Beur films.

The Mother-Daughter Dyad in Contemporary French Films

Contemporary French films from or about the North African community use the subjectivity of the migrant woman as the locus of debate over French secularism, linked in these films to modernity, and an Algeria-based Islam, linked in these films to traditionalism. Specifically, I argue that contemporary French films about the North African community embody the negotiation of religiosity and secularism in a mother-daughter dyad that must break with each other in order to allow the growth and autonomy of the modern French daughter. These films set up a false binary between “Muslim” and “French” through the trope of the traditional Muslim mother and the assimilated French daughter. This binary pervades popular discourse about integration, assimilation, and generational changes of North African communities.

These films rely on binaries of youth and old age to represent the struggles that women face as they work to negotiate the conflicts between the society around them and their family. Often this binary is embodied in the youthful second-generation adolescent character (usually experiencing a sexual awakening) and the aging first-generation mother. This trend is seen in other transnational films, like *Real Women Have Curves* (Patricia Cardoso, 2002) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (Gurinder Chadha, 2002) or played for laughs in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (Joel Zwick, 2002). In the French films I wish to discuss here, the first generation mother is at a loss to deal with the strange mores of the host society, and so clings to religious law and custom to protect both herself and her daughters from unknown forces. The mother is generally dressed in traditional North African costume, made up in tattoos, positioned almost exclusively in the family apartment (most likely obeying purdah), and engaged in rituals and prayers throughout

the narrative. Often times this character is demonized as a witch or an ogre, instrument and agent for Islam. Other times, the mother is simply ignorant and has nothing more to strengthen her than what she knows of religion.

The young woman character must choose between her traditional family and modern France, with Islam often cast by the wayside as casualty of her transition to fully realized French citizenship. The young woman character is articulate, angry, and active, compared to her mother's submission to enforced domesticity. The daughter is attractive and developing a sexual autonomy. The conflict in these films is between these two female characters; male characters, even those who are threatening, exist only on the periphery of the true drama of the films. These films locate patriarchal domination within the figure of the mother, who herself is vulnerable to the patriarchal norms she is seen inflicting on her daughter. By making the mother the agent of traditional religious patriarchy, the films very often elide the complex network of economic, racial, class, legal, and institutional dynamics that inform these families' position within French society.

One short from the 1990s provides an early template for this oft-used trope. In Fejria Deliba's 1991 12-minute short *Le petit chat est mort* (*The Kitten is Dead*), lycée student Mona (Linda Chaib) practices lines from Moliere's *L'école des Femmes* (*The School for Wives*) with her traditionally costumed mother (Fatima Chatter) as a stand-in. Her mother's lack of education and modern orientation are emphasized not only by the woman's costuming and her placement in the kitchen but also by the woman's inability to understand the difference between her daughter's attitudes and the young female character's attitudes in the play. The daughter then remembers a date and heads out the door, lying to her mother about where she's headed and applying lipstick as she exits. The short examines confrontations between assimilating daughters and their immigrant parents. The settings involve the family home, a space that the young woman treats as a trap or prison by her clear desire to quickly escape. The young woman is characterized by her facility with mainstream French culture represented by the

Moliere play, and her desire to leave the home for the benefits of French culture, i.e. the sexual freedoms of independent dating. *Le petit chat est mort* creates an ultimatum for its protagonist, an either/or situation that forces the character to choose between the film's version of French modernity and Algerian/Muslim traditionalism.

This image of daughters fleeing through doorways, staring out of high-rise windows, gazing from balconies, scurrying through streets, is endemic throughout these films. Mise-en-scene and performance situate the daughter as one who desires, who longs for more. The daughter creates her own identity outside the confines of the home, equated with the religious patriarchal order, in the streets and institutions of secular France. She may do so by partnering sexually with a French man, often a blank slate, a peripheral character who stands by as the daughter explains her choices to her sisters. She may disappear altogether, haunting the text with her absence. At the same time, placing mothers strictly within the domestic space of small apartments, kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms, characterizes her without offering her subjectivity—she will turn her face to the wall rather than look outside her own proscribed sphere.

Sexual Modernity in *17 Rue Bleue*

The narrative constraints of the short form are one explanation for the rough-hewn characterization in *Le petit chat est mort*. Yet feature length films use these same tropes without much change or development. In Chad Chenougga's 2001 *17 Rue Bleue*, the central character's physicality and beauty embodies a valorized sexual modernity, which this film argues defies the religious strictures of Islam. This film uses the mother-daughter dyad to contrast modern France with a traditional Islam. Adda (Lysiane Meis), a fully acculturated French-Maghrebi woman, lives happily with her two sons in 1970s Paris. Her married French lover promises to leave all his wealth to her upon his death; unfortunately he dies too soon to fulfill the legal requirements for such an arrangement. Adda engages in a legal battle with his widow to win the money she needs to maintain her family's lifestyle.

Adda's health, beauty, vivacity, and grace are only possible because of her embrace of a French lifestyle, here coded as sexually liberated, urban, and modern. The mise-en-scene uses Art Modern styles to characterize Adda. Adda wears bright pinks and red costumes, with dazzling abstract patterns, and dresses her hair in contemporary wigs. She furnishes the apartment, paid for by her lover's estate, in slender lamps, elongated vases, and low couches, with paintings decorating the walls. Adda's two sisters Leila (Saïda Jawad) and Yasmine (Rania Meziani) live with her, and they function as contrasts to her version of modernity. Yasmine, the dour older sister, dresses modestly and plainly. She wears her hair long, which accentuates her narrow, unsmiling face. She becomes a pharmacist, and works hard, only en scene in the evenings after school or work. She also censors Adda and the boys' behavior as she sees fit. Leila is the youngest sister and Adda's influence on her is unmistakable. She too dresses in bright colors and wears her effervescent sexuality openly.

The story creates a series of escalating disappointments in Adda's legal journey, and illustrates how these disappointments impact the transplanted family. The arrival of Adda's mother (Chafia Boudraa) marks the beginning of the end. Adda's mother represents visually all that Adda left behind in Algeria, traditional dress, attitudes, and morality. The mother's costuming, speech, and behavior situate her as foreign and exotic for Chad (Abdel Halis) and Sam (Aimen Ben Ahmed), Adda's sons who occupy the narrative center. With her arrival, Yasmine's attitudes take on more prominence, blaming Adda's example for Leila's newly discovered pregnancy. On a weekend swimming trip at the beach, Adda's mother drags Adda into the water, slapping her, tearing off her wig, and dunking her into the water. Yasmine stands by and keeps the two boys from intervening. Adda's mother calls Adda a whore and admonishes her to repent. The film cuts from this violent exchange to the airport where Leila meekly follows her mother through customs. Adda appears bleak and tired, the first signs of weakness in her previous cheerful demeanor.

The rest of the film chronicles her slow dissolution brought on

by her addiction to prescription medication. As if faced with the stern rebuke of her traditional heritage, Adda admits defeat and destroys herself in response. She attempts suicide at one point. When she returns from the hospital she takes to her bed, never leaving until her death. By the end of the film she becomes the haunting presence that her sons cannot escape, the insistent ghoul that keeps them from fully integrating in friendships, romances, and school. In a sense, she exerts the same influence on her sons that her mother has exerted on her. The film proposes that Adda's ultimate defeat may be her naïve hope that she can live in both the tightly-knit family, grounded in traditional values, and in the secular openness of the new country. *17 Rue Bleue* portrays the traditional, here Islam, and the modern, France, as incompatible. French-Maghrebi women must chose one over the other.

Patriarchal Excess of the Witch in *Inch'Allah Dimanche*

As mentioned earlier, the mother-daughter dyad focuses the narrative drama on the women of the film. The men, who may hold considerable authority within the family or community, are relegated to the periphery. Occasionally the male characters use physical force to re-insert themselves into the narrative, but the female characters wield the true dramatic power. This strategy also displaces patriarchal excesses onto a generation of crones and witches: seemingly husbands would not enforce brutal religious edict if their manipulative mothers did not demand it. In Yamina Benguigui's 2001 *Inch'Allah Dimanche*, the mother-daughter dyad is configured through Zouina (Fejria Deliba), the wife of Ahmed (Zinedine Soualem), and Ahmed's mother Aicha (Rabia Mokedem). Under the Family Reunification Act, Zouina and Aicha, along with Zouina's three children, join Ahmed in France. He has been working there for ten years, and his relationship to Zouina has been reduced to yearly visits, during which he has taken a second wife. Zouina and Aicha are confined to the row house and each other's company in an effort to follow purdah requirements. Much of the film documents their power struggle in relation to Ahmed. As the mother, Aicha culturally has more

power than Zouina. Aicha does much to reinforce this power from locking up the food, to controlling Zouina's interactions with the neighbors, to reporting Zouina's behavior to Ahmed when he returns home. One of her coups involves Sunday afternoon outings with her son, while Zouina must stay inside with the children.

The film contrasts Zouina and Aicha through their dress, with youthfulness inscribed to Zouina and traditionalism to Aicha. The film uses close-ups on Zouina's colorful skirts, aprons, and veils to reveal the inner strength and vibrancy Zouina possesses, which may not be immediately evident as she suffers the selfish behavior of her mother-in-law. Aicha's close-ups focus on her tattoos and rituals, her chants and prayers, locating her solidly within a mystical spirituality unexplored or shared by Zouina. Yet, many cultural behaviors that Aicha insists upon Zouina performs for Aicha's benefit. For example, when visitors arrive, Aicha demands certain protocol concerning tea and gift exchange be met, yet it is Zouina who prepares and pours the tea while Aicha converses with the guests. This of course emphasizes the hierarchical relationship that Aicha maintains in relation to her daughter-in-law. This same behavior inscribes Islam and related cultural practices from Algeria with a meaninglessness, an empty attempt at domination. And this is the tragedy of Aicha's character, that she becomes merely a repressive structure that frames Zouina's daily life, but has little subjectivity within the film. The film even gives Ahmed, with his desire to play electric guitar, more inner life than Aicha.

Zouina's few outlets involve listening to a French radio program, a program that all her neighbors listen to every afternoon. The film makes a point that even though the neighborhood women may be separated by age, race, religion, class, or colonial history, all the modern women sympathize with the radio program's stories of female-centered love and tragedy. Aicha, identified here as the fundamentalist crone, often blames the radio for Zouina's poor behavior, isolating the radio as a modern French influence, in contrast to the proper traditional influences of husband and mother-in-law. Zouina also makes friendships with French people

in the neighborhood; her closest ally is a divorcée factory worker who visits occasionally with small gifts. As Zouina gains greater access to the outside world, she builds friendships with the widow of a military commander killed in Algeria, a French bus driver, and the French grocery owners down the street. These relationships not only signify her growing alignment with French culture and mores, but among them the characters represent power, independence, mobility, and access to capital. At the beginning of the film, Aicha announces her desire to isolate herself in tradition when she declares to the neighbors that her son's house is the Casbah. By the end of the film the Franco-French characters gather around Zouina as she makes a stand against Aicha. This stand-off happens in the street, the public domain of France, an escape route from Islam, Algeria, Aicha, and oppression. The film ends inexplicably with Ahmed agreeing to Zouina's request, and turning violently, noisily, against his mother's demands. Ahmed's change of heart is completely unmotivated, but the film presents Zouina's win against her mother-in-law as her remove from traditional, Algerian, Muslim restrictions to modern, French integration.

Maternal Modernity in *Samia*

In contrast to the above films, Phillippe Faucon's *Samia* (2001), based on Soraya Nini's novel and screenplay, advances the mother-daughter dyad in an opposite trajectory, creating a strong mother character that develops a modern sensibility throughout the film. The film juxtaposes the mother figure to her already modern daughter. As Samia (Lynda Benahouda) finishes lycée, she must choose between the insulting expectations of French institutions and her traditional family—unsuccessful scholastically, she can work as a cleaning woman or she can help her mother Halima (Kheira Oualhaci) run the home for her father and brothers. Neither of these options inspires Samia who longs to escape both. She fights with her brother Yacine (Mohamed Chabane-Chaouche), who has taken responsibility for her honor once her father leaves for Algeria for his health. Halima works to mediate

between the two. Halima often must physically separate the two from attacking each other: Samia longing for French independence and her brother Yacine demanding strict adherence to traditional codes regarding female movement and heterosexual relationships.

Yacine is characterized mainly in his capacity to patrol his sisters. He is often shot in extreme long shot waiting outside shopping malls or cruising the streets in desperation to find them. Yacine is insistent to establish gender segregation throughout the film. An oft-repeated composition is of Yacine and his father in the foreground eating on the sofa during dinner with his sisters relegated behind him to the kitchen table. The film provides some motivation for Yacine's insistence at maintaining traditional order, as he has little success in modern, secular France. He cannot find a job, which the film contributes to his North African name, and at one point he has a run in with the police which seems mostly about his skin color. His father's repeated advice to him to "Be a man," begs the question of what masculinity means here in France. Yacine has little to no control over his own life, and so he concentrates on controlling those in his family. This leads to his more desperate attempts at controlling his sisters' mobility and sexuality. By the end of the film he orders his mother to take his daughters to the gynecologist for virginity checks.

While Yacine and Samia at first appear to be our two main characters, facing off over modernity and religion, Halima becomes Samia's true counterpart in the narrative. Samia aims her hottest anger at Halima, who represents Samia's dreaded future. Yet the film characterizes Halima as a practicing Muslim with a developing modernity. Interspersed throughout the film are quiet moments of Halima's devotions, either in prayer, reflection, or in teaching her younger children about God's omniscience. The film captures these moments in 3/4 shots, with only ambient sound to punctuate the scene. At her prayers, Halima bends and kneels awkwardly, as age has made her joints inflexible. Yet she continues to perform these prayers. She prays alone, not joined by anyone else in the family at dawn. Even with the younger children, Halima faces a losing battle as they giggle at her religious teaching and question her lack of logic.

Halima herself has little in way of response to her children, facing them only with stubbornness. Yet her religion connects Halima to the community at large through ceremony and ritual. As she participates in Ramadan preparations or wedding celebrations, the film pictures her against a backdrop of other women and families, who have been characterized by their varying responses to French influences, voiced as each attempts to consult with Halima about Samia. The community offers a spectrum of modern responses to Samia's situation, an open exchange and discussion about how to keep the family together in secular France. Halima profits from this intellectual exchange, which brings her to a better understanding of her daughters and their desires.

Thus, Halima proves the most dramatic character that changes throughout the film. The film constructs Halima's subjectivity through her psychic transformation from Samia's enforcer to her supporter. Halima's eventual domination of the visual image, through her prayers, through reaction shots which capture her thinking about the action unfolding in front of her, also contribute to her evolving subjectivity. Eventually, Halima's decision to divest Yacine of his family power by removing his sisters from his presence solidifies her as the true subject of the film. She confronts Yacine at the harbor, a liminal space of coming and going, entering and exiting, interiority and exteriority, public and private. The daughters gather to one side, the open air and blue sky behind them. Halima holds a suitcase in her hand. The imagery is clear: these women will make their own decisions about how to live their lives. It may or may not include religion but it certainly will not include oppression.

Though the film occupies itself with Samia's burgeoning sexuality and physical longing for freedom, she is more of a victim-type than an actual character. Samia knows all the answers about modern French freedoms from the beginning; she never changes or develops a consciousness beyond her opening scenes. And though the film builds audience identification through the pleasure of her rebellious actions, Samia becomes a catalyst for Halima's development. In this film the mother figure develops a

modern consciousness over the course of the narrative, achieved through continual input from the surrounding community, as different neighbors, relatives, and communal leaders offer Halima diverse ideas about appropriate female behavior in modern France. By the end of the film Halima assumes her son's authority telling him that he will no longer treat his sisters as he has. The film offers a spectrum of ideas on female behavior and modernity is achieved within the traditional community through dialogue and exchange.

Glimpses of communal negotiation are rare. More often the case, as in *Le Satin Rouge* (*Red Satin*, Raja Amari, 2002), *Chaos*, or others, the female protagonist must walk away from home-family-tradition-religion to find happiness. A few films show the female's return to Algeria to gain understanding of herself—Ghorab-Volta's *Souviens-Toi de Moi* (*Remember Me*, 1996) or *La Fille de Keltoum* are prime examples. Yet, these returns are a temporary journey of self-discovery, which highlight the protagonist's differences from the community, and end with a return to modern France (or the Suisse Romande in the case of *Keltoum*). Rarer still is the permanent return to North Africa, as demonstrated by the minor character Fathi in Mehdi Charef's *Marie-Line* (2000). *La Graine et le Mulet* characterizes the expansive North African family as a source of strength in the face of the globalizing economic and corporate forces that challenge France and its workers. Yet this film foregoes religious iconography for more general North African irreligious codes like couscous, belly-dancing, and particular musical instruments like the tabl to define the cultural affiliations of the complex family at its center.

My attention to the mother-daughter dyad and its accompanying tropes and characterizations reveal that as the post-Beur film culture focuses now on women and their stories, the dyad trope displaces men from a portrayal of nationalism, patriarchy, religion, and hierarchy. Films that use the trope focus their critique of women's experience on particular women in a particular family and elide the greater institutional forces that influence their lives. The dyad also fails to account for the complex hopes and aspirations of the North African migrant community in France, which very

often includes creating an identity around a French Islam. The continued portrayal of the fleeing daughter, leaving behind the Muslim home, is ultimately an image of death. The vibrant, modern, sexual citizen flees the despotic religious home and takes with her capacities of rejuvenation, renewal, reproduction, and rebirth. The home is left empty, to wither around the crone.

Conclusion

The films discussed above present a modern secular French identity to its audience, embodied in the French-Maghrebi woman. This character flees from those religious strictures that would hold her back from fully integrating in republican France, from fully embracing her identity as a modern woman, and controlling her own destiny. The development of this narrative trend has its roots in both growing anti-Muslim sentiment and the continuing secularization of North African youth in France. As a last note, we must realize that this representation does not fully articulate the aims of varying members of the North African immigrant community. Some members hope to present themselves as Muslim citizens in France, as evidenced by the importance of the French Council on the Muslim Religion. Others hope to privatize Islam for personal practice, without irritating French society, as shown by sociological studies. Both groups are developing a French Islam, working from opposite sides of the goal. Ultimately, contemporary hopes center on establishing a viable religious identity in secular France, hand in hand with French citizenship.

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